

EvanstonReview

The grass really is greener

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When Mark Opal told some of his buddies in the landscaping business that his customers had started clamoring for organic fertilizer, they laughed and told him it was just a fad.

"I say, 'Fad or not, it's a better product,'" said Opal, plant health care specialist for Rosborough Partners in Libertyville. Organic fertilizer works up to build up the soil, not just to give the grass a shot of synthetic nitrogen that greens it up but ultimately weakens the living balance of the soil.

"You can restore your lawn," said pediatrician Marny Turvill, who owns Healthy Green Goods in Evanston. "You have done significant damage with synthetic fertilizers because the chemicals not only weaken your plants and make them more prone to disease, but they also sterilize the soil."

However, Dr. Turvill said, quitting the use of synthetic yard care chemicals is just like quitting smoking.

"You have done damage, but you can fix it," she said.

Along with using organic fertilizer, homeowners can also let their grass grow up to three inches tall, Opal said.

"The taller the better, because you've got more photosynthesis and taller grass shades out weed seeds," he said.

Organic fertilizer is just one of the many environmentally friendly products Rosborough offers. For insect control, they offer a pest spray that's 93 percent soy bean oil, which coats and suffocates the insects; to repel nuisance animals they put down a mint-based spray; and for mosquito control, Rosborough uses an organic substance in ponds and fountains that breaks the water tension so mosquitos can't land and breed.

The company also has organic weed control products and even a fungus control product that changes soil conditions from a fungal environment to a beneficial bacterial environment.

Greenwise organic yard care company of Evanston uses similar products. But it's the organic fertilizer made of worm castings that just may be co-founder Marc Wise's favorite offering, which naturally aerate the soil as they break down and also help restore the soil's proper balance of minerals, moisture and pH balance.

"Worm castings are very mineral rich," he said. "If you look at good soil, you see worms. They're like little organic lawn tenders under the soil making an environment for life to thrive in."

It can take time for weak lawns to repair themselves, Opal said, as the soil improves, the roots thicken, the grass grows stronger and the weeds get choked out.

Susan and Greg Heiser started getting organic fertilizer put down on their lawn last year. This year, Susan Heiser said she sees a noticeable difference.

"It's growing like crazy," she said. "Our lawn is really green."

-Stephanie Fosnight

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